

The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature

Joseph Butler

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Joseph Butler's great work is the Analogy, published in 1736, and from that day read and admired by every highly-cultivated mind. He was induced to write by a state of things very remarkable in the history of religion. England had reached the culminating point of irreligion, and the firm re-establishment of Episcopacy had as yet done nothing to mend the nation's morals. Piety was deemed a mark of ignorance and vulgarity, and multitudes of those who professed it were persecuted to dungeons and death. It was considered settled, especially in polite circles, that Christianity, after so long a prevalence, had been found out to be an imposture. The clergy, as a body, did nothing to dispel this moral gloom, but rather increased it by their violent and scandalous conduct. In the sad language of Bishop Warburton, "Religion had lost its hold on the minds of the people."

To the Analogy no reply has ever been attempted. Written for a present purpose, and most signally accomplishing it, it is yet so written as to endure, in full value, through all coming time. It is undoubtedly "the most original and the most profound work extant, in any language, on the philosophy of religion," "the most argumentative and philosophical defence of Christianity ever submitted to the world." - Summary by Preface

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